"The Levitation of Jacob"

The Black Cat

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The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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The Levitation of Jacob.*

BY CLIFFORD HOWARD.

AS I cast my eye over the advertising columns of the *Journal* I was attracted by the following notice, printed in small type and tucked away in an inconspicuous place:

> HIRAM JACOB,
> Post-office Box 975.
> ANNIHILATOR OF THE UNDESIRABLE.

I am not naturally a person of much curiosity, but it seemed to me that there was something very unusual about this advertisement. It may not have impressed other readers in the same way, but it surely appealed to me as a most singular announcement. I could not rid my mind of it, and the more I thought of it the more curious I became.

But I never spend time in idle speculation. My policy is to get at the facts of a case. Accordingly, I clipped the advertisement and enclosed it in a note addressed to Hiram Jacob, asking him to furnish me with full particulars.

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $200 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

After waiting a day I received this answer, written on the typewriter in regular business form:

> My Dear Sir: — In reply to your favor of this date I beg to inform you that I am now prepared to fill orders for the extermination of human pests. Drunkards and worthless grandparents a specialty. Particular attention paid to the annihilation of personal enemies, money-borrowers, organ-grinders, mischievous gossips, miserly relatives and confirmed dyspeptics. In short, my business applies to all individuals who are a burden to society or whose existence interferes with the life, liberty or happiness of others.
>
> I am the discoverer and sole possessor of a method of annihilation that defies detection. It is instantaneous, clean, noiseless and absolutely certain. It leaves not a shadow of a trace behind. It is annihilation, pure and simple. This I guarantee. In the case of relatives it saves all bother and expense of funerals. This is an important item.
>
> My terms are $500 for each case, cash in advance. Twenty per cent. discount for two in a family if ordered at the same time. Orders executed within three days after receipt, or money refunded. Special yearly rates for the annihilation of tramps.
>
> My patrons assume no risk. Those who fear possibility of detection (though I guarantee there is none) need not reveal their identity. Simply write name and address of party to be exterminated and forward with bank note to
>
> Yours truly,
> Hiram Jacob,
> *Annihilator of the Undesirable.*

There was a straightforwardness about this letter which impressed me very favorably. The man was evidently sincere, notwithstanding that he was several generations in advance of his time. But I was particularly struck with what he said in reference to his method of business. The absolute annihilation of a body has always been regarded as a physical impossibility, yet here was a man who claimed to have discovered a means of accomplishing it and was ready to put it to practical use for the benefit of humanity.

As an investigator and a seeker after truth I felt it my duty to look into this matter more deeply. I have spent many thousands of dollars in scientific experiments and research, and the question of five hundred dollars offered but little objection to satisfying myself of the truth of this man's claim regarding his remarkable discovery. A more serious matter was the selection of somebody to be annihilated.

I had in mind quite a number of both men and women who would answer the purpose very satisfactorily. The difficulty lay

in making a choice. There were several whose sudden taking off I knew would prove a godsend to their relatives. In fact, I was myself possessed of an aged and unbalanced aunt, whose death was impatiently awaited by every member of the family.

She was a helpless invalid, totally deaf and almost blind, and subject to the peevish hallucination that the neighbors were spitting at her. Her lucid moments were devoted to wagging her head and mumbling grievously because she was not in heaven, where she had an idea she belonged.

Everybody said — and said it quite freely, too — that it would be a mercy if she died. But whenever she developed alarming symptoms which gave promise of her speedy termination, the doctor was hastily called and she was nursed back to life with much care and solicitude.

It was probably the same spirit which impelled us to do all we could to prolong her days of misery that now deterred me from selecting her for the hand of Jacob. Besides her I had two or three other relatives who, for one reason or another, would have been more agreeable in the graveyard than around the house, but I have a natural delicacy about tampering with relatives.

At the same time, to get rid of a member of the family would have served a purely personal end, and that was not my object in this matter. I desired simply to make a scientific investigation, aside from all family or selfish considerations, and I therefore determined to select some one whose annihilation would not only serve the cause of science, but at the same time be a benefit to society at large.

Accordingly, I picked out Bill Tizer. Bill Tizer was a notorious scamp — a hard drinker and a gambler; convicted of a number of minor offences and always suspected of larger ones; a charge on the community, utterly worthless, and a dangerous element of society. If ever there was a man unfit to live it was Bill Tizer, and I felt myself a public benefactor when I placed my order for him with the Annihilator of the Undesirable.

For the next two days after mailing the order I spent my time following Bill Tizer about town. It was important that I should be on hand when the annihilation took place, and as a consequence most of my time was given up to lounging about in saloons. It

was not altogether good for my reputation, but I have learned to sacrifice much for the sake of science, and when it was rumored that I had taken to drink and was seen prowling about Deadman's Alley in a state of intoxication, I accepted my fate with the meekness of a martyr.

The reward of my vigilance and self-sacrifice came at last. It was on the afternoon of the third day, and it may not be amiss to add that I shall never forget that day. It was shortly after three o'clock. I was crossing a street in the business section of the city, following in the tipsy footsteps of Bill Tizer, who was a few feet ahead of me. I was just in the act of reaching forward to pull him out of the way of a cart when a most astonishing thing occurred —

Bill Tizer suddenly vanished.

The hand that I had raised to take him by the shoulder fell upon empty air. Only an instant before he had been directly in front of me. I was looking right at him. Now he was gone as completely as if he had never existed.

The effect of his disappearance was like that of a gas jet that is suddenly extinguished — now you see it, now you don't. He simply went out of existence, instantly and completely, without a sign, without a trace of what had become of him.

Had I been the only witness of this marvel I should probably have doubted my senses; but what I had seen was confirmed by the driver of the cart, who was so overcome with fright that he gave vent to a series of unearthly yells, which not only served his horse as a pretext to run away, but attracted a large and inquisitive crowd.

The street at this point is paved with Belgian blocks. I examined the pavement carefully. It was firm and solid. There was no manhole, no sewer trap, no opening of any kind into which my victim might have fallen.

Neither could I discover the slightest trace of the man. There was no sign of blood, no scrap of clothing, no mark of any sort in the dust or on the stones — absolutely nothing to indicate the spot where he had disappeared or to show how he had passed out of existence. He was gone, body and soul.

There could be no doubt about it; I was the witness of a mar-

vellous phenomenon, a phenomenon in contradiction of all the laws of physics — the complete and total annihilation of matter. The demonstration was complete and beyond question; but the mystery of it was unfathomable.

The announcement that Bill Tizer was missing and that no clue to his whereabouts could be found attracted but little public interest. Despite the story of his disappearance as told by the drunken driver, it was taken for granted that he had tumbled into the river, and the police made no special effort to find him, nor did I deem it worth while to make any mention of my association with the affair. It was a case of good riddance to bad rubbish, and the public was satisfied to let it go at that.

But scarcely had the incident passed from mind, when the mystery connected with it was revived by another remarkable and mysterious disappearance. A retired banker, an old man by the name of Muldoon, suddenly disappeared one morning.

He had left his home to call at the house of a friend about two blocks away. Several persons distinctly remembered having passed him on the street, and one man testified that he had stopped and talked with him at the very doorstep of his friend's house. That was the last seen of him. He never reached his destination.

While the police and the public racked their startled brains for some solution of this extraordinary affair, I saw in it at once the mighty hand of the mysterious Jacob. Evidently he had secured another customer, for I had not considered it necessary to place a second order with him, as he had fully satisfied me of his ability as an annihilator. My chief desire now was to learn his secret; yet there was something so overwhelmingly wonderful and incomprehensible about it that I was at a loss to even conjecture his possible method of operation.

Then, about a week after the annihilation of the venerable Muldoon, the community was thrown into a state of bewilderment by the similar disappearance of an old lady. Her case was even more remarkable than either of the previous ones. She was an invalid (had been an invalid for fifty years), and was being wheeled slowly up and down the sunny side of the street near her home, when suddenly she and her entire outfit of chair, nurse and pet poodle vanished from the face of the earth.

It may readily be imagined that my science-loving soul was stirred to its depths by this demonstration of Jacob's miraculous force; and while, of course, I agreed with the community that it was a very unceremonious way for this time-worn lady to make her exit from the stage of life, I was too deeply impressed with the scientific aspect of the case to give much attention to the sentimental side of it.

But my feelings on the subject were very abruptly altered by a startling and most unexpected incident. I received the following letter from Hiram Jacob:

> DEAR SIR: — Your attentions to a certain young lady, whom it is unnecessary for me to mention by name, are the cause of much unhappiness to a fellow-mortal. On his behalf I warn you to completely sever your acquaintanceship with the said young lady on or before the 20th inst.

Now, I am not a man who is readily frightened; but the prospect of personally experiencing complete annihilation was by no means agreeable. There could be no doubt that that was the meaning of the letter. Some cowardly rival for the hand of Helen Baker had evidently placed an order for me with the inscrutable Jacob. Unfortunately, Miss Baker had so many admirers in addition to myself that I was at a loss to know which one to accuse of this villanous threat; nor was I in a financial position to wreak wholesale vengeance by placing an order for the annihilation of the entire lot.

At the same time, I did not propose to be bulldozed, and within an hour after the receipt of the letter I called on Miss Baker with an avowal which I had had in contemplation for some time past; and when I left I was calling her Helen, and we kissed one another good-night.

I mention this, not so much for the purpose of showing Miss Baker's preference for me above her numerous suitors, but to demonstrate that I am no coward.

I knew it would be both senseless and futile to call the attention of the police to Jacob's letter. It contained no real threat of violence; and were I to explain who the writer was, by declaring him to be the destroyer of Bill Tizer, it would be impossible to prove it. Besides, if by any possibility I could prove the assertion, it would necessarily involve me in the matter and I would be

adjudged as guilty as Jacob himself — perhaps more so — and that would mean the disgraceful termination of my days on the end of a rope. Between the two, I preferred clean, respectable annihilation.

As to giving up Helen, that was out of the question. I was engaged to her now, and I am particularly conscientious about keeping my engagements. My rival should see that I was not a man to be intimidated, and furthermore I was determined he should not succeed in his murderous design.

I made up my mind to find Hiram Jacob. I felt that if I could once get hold of him I could arrange matters to our mutual satisfaction as between brother scientists. Pride would not permit me to write to him, for I would not put myself in the attitude of pleading for mercy.

I had made several attempts before to locate him, for my curiosity had impelled me to seek from him an explanation of his marvellous secret, but all my efforts in that direction had been in vain. Beyond his post-office box he appeared to have no existence.

As the matter had now assumed a much more serious aspect I devoted my entire time and energy to his discovery. The date fixed for my extermination was but five days off. Three of these days I spent in the post-office, from early morning until late at night, keeping a watch on Box 975.

Despite my vigilance it was not until this much of my time had been consumed that I was able to discover who took the mail from this particular box. It was only then by the merest chance that I made the discovery. I happened to turn rather suddenly in my slow pacing up and down the lobby and caught a small boy in the act of taking a letter from No. 975. He unlocked and closed the box again so quickly that had I been fifteen seconds later I should have missed him.

Putting the letter in his pocket he left the building. I at once followed him, keeping him well in sight, but avoiding any appearance of tracking him. After a walk of several blocks he stopped at a letter box on a street corner. Taking the letter from his pocket he placed it in a large envelope and sealed it, and was in the act of mailing it when it slipped from his hand and fell to the

ground. Ere he could pick it up I saw the address, "Room 37, Dunton Building."

That was all. There was no name. But the clew was sufficient, and the next day found me knocking at No. 37, Dunton Building, bright and early in the morning. Six different times I called and pounded on the door and stamped about impatiently in the hall, but each time without success. Then the janitor told me that no one occupied the room. He said some one had rented it, but never used it; the only one who called was the postman, and he always dropped the letters through the opening in the door.

With the aid of a button-hook and several keys I succeeded in gaining an entrance to the room the next morning. This was the twentieth of the month, my last day of grace, and I took it for granted that desperate chances were permissible.

The room was without furniture and totally bare. On the floor lay two letters where the carrier had dropped them through the door. I had brought my lunch with me, for I was determined to remain until Mr. Jacob called for his letters. Notwithstanding the janitor's statement, it was plain that Jacob must sneak into the room some time during the day or night to get his mail. I also had my revolver with me, for contingencies.

Two or three hours passed, without a sound or sign of anybody. My vigil was becoming irksome. I sat on the window-sill, keeping one eye on the door and allowing the other to see as much as it could of the roofs and chimneys outside, by way of diversion.

Twelve o'clock came and I was still alone. I took my lunch from my pocket, and as I did so I happened to glance down at the floor. The letters that had been lying there close to the door had disappeared.

A creepy chill passed over me. No one had entered the room. I had fastened the bolt when I came in and the door was still bolted. There was no opening under the door through which the letters could have been extracted.

The situation was positively uncanny, and combined with the mystery of Jacob's existence and the realization of his fearful power, I do not think I can be blamed for feeling decidedly uncomfortable — not to say scared.

There are times when the bravest of men lose their nerve, when judgment and reason are thrown to the winds under the stress of sudden fear or excitement. I rushed from the room and out into the street. There was now but one chance for my life. Pride, love, happiness must be the sacrifice — but Helen would understand when I explained the terrible situation to her. The last day of my life was ebbing away, and Jacob, that dark angel of death, might take it into his head to call early.

When I reached the house I hesitated. My senses were coming back to me. Perhaps my hated rival was watching me, smiling with diabolical satisfaction at my weakness. I let my hand drop from the door-bell without ringing it. Pride and determination returned. I was myself once more — unconquered and undaunted. I turned and walked with a firm step toward my own home.

Arrived there, I wrote a long and most affectionate letter of farewell to Helen. I decided to send it by special delivery, in order that she might receive it before the news of my disappearance reached her. It would lessen the shock. As I read the missive over it brought tears to my eyes, it aroused in me an inexpressible sympathy for Helen in her impending bereavement. She would be deprived even of the consolation of putting flowers on my grave. There would be no grave, no remains, no funeral, no opportunity for a last expression of love.

I also wrote letters to several of my scientific friends, explaining my situation and asking them, in the name of science, to discover this man Jacob and force from him an explanation of what had become of me.

I was still writing, seated at a small table on the back veranda overlooking the garden, when I was interrupted by the appearance of a small, genial-faced man, about fifty years of age, who came up the steps, smiling most graciously.

"Pardon my interruption," he said politely, coming forward and shaking my hand with great cordiality. "My name is Jacob — Hiram Jacob."

Then, taking a seat directly opposite me at the table, he continued — smiling blandly all the while — "I have called a little earlier than I expected, as I have an engagement out of the city; and it has occurred to me that if you have come to a decision in

the matter about which I wrote you, it would be useless to put off till to-morrow that which can be done to-day. May I ask, therefore, what your decision is?"

"My decision is that I will not be bulldozed by anybody," I answered warmly, bringing my fist down on the table.

"Very well," he replied calmly. "That settles the matter at once. But before proceeding, I think I owe you an explanation, in view of my letter of the fifteenth."

"No explanations are necessary," I retorted. "I am fully aware of who you are, Mr. Jacob, and what you intend doing. I have myself employed your services."

"Ah, indeed," he answered. "Of course as all my correspondents are anonymous I cannot be expected to recognize old patrons. I trust you found my services satisfactory?"

"Not only satisfactory, but of the greatest interest," I replied, glad of a chance to gain time. "I am myself a scientist, and your discovery has aroused my most ardent curiosity and, I may add, my warmest admiration. And by the way," I added suddenly, "I am also much interested in the manner in which you obtain your mail from Room 37, Dunton Building."

I thought I would startle him, but he answered quietly: "In my room below No. 37, where I have an office in the name of Thomas Sullivan, I simply pull a cord that is attached to a hinged plank in the floor above, and the letters drop through an opening in the ceiling whenever I am ready to receive them. That's a very simple trick; don't you think it is?"

I told him I thought it was very simple indeed.

"I want to be perfectly frank with you," he went on, "for there is no reason why I should conceal anything from you. It flatters me to know that you are interested in my discovery, and I have no objection to explaining it to you, as one man of science to another, especially as you will yourself be the subject of a demonstration of it within the next few minutes."

"Will seven hundred and fifty dollars induce you to throw up the job?" I asked.

"Couldn't think of it for a moment, my dear sir," he answered, striking a match and lighting his cigar. "I have a reputation to sustain, and I have made it a rule never to permit anything to

interfere with carrying out an order. I can assure you, however, that it is painless, absolutely painless; and besides, you have the satisfaction of knowing that your annihilation means the happiness of a fellow-being."

"Then you mean to say that there is no possible means by which this murder can be avoided?" I asked, half rising in my chair with a determination to have first play in the game by shooting Mr. Jacob through the head.

"Tut, tut, my dear sir; you will gain nothing by such tactics as that," he answered, serenely, looking at me with half-closed eyes as he puffed the smoke from his smiling mouth. "I have merely to press the button you see on this instrument," he added, holding up to view the small, leather-covered box he had with him, "and the work is done in the twinkling of an eye."

I settled back in my chair. "And is your power of annihilation contained in that little, camera-like box?" I asked, forgetting in my curiosity the fate that was so near at hand.

"Just so," he responded; "just so. You have hit the nail on the head. I have simply to point the annihilator at my subject and push the button. Great invention, is it not?"

He turned the apparatus slowly around in his hands, while he fixed his gaze upon me with an expression of benevolent appreciation of my interest in the matter.

"In this instrument is stored the greatest power of the ages — the power of levitation. You look surprised; but the truth is, I have discovered a means of destroying gravitation — and behold, I have levitation, the antithesis of gravity! Many men have claimed this before and have duped the innocents by illusions and stories of floating bodies, men and furniture suspended in mid-air. But common sense should have told them that the destruction of gravity would not have such a result as that.

"What is it that holds us on the earth? It is the force of gravity, is it not? Of course it is. In this latitude the earth revolves on its axis at the rate of nearly a thousand miles an hour. Now, when I destroy in you the force of gravitation, you, as a man of science, know as well as I what will happen. The centrifugal force of the earth's revolution will shoot you off into space at the rate of sixteen miles a minute; so fast that the eye cannot follow

you. You will be out of sight in a twinkling. Now, that's as plain as the nose on your face — don't you think it is?"

I assured him that it was all very plain.

"As to what becomes of you," he went on, "is neither here nor there. So far as this earth is concerned, you will be annihilated. You will leave it with the force of a cannon-ball and nothing this side of the moon can stop you. You may perhaps land on the moon or you may go on to the sun, or you may continue to shoot through space, forever and a day. But these are questions that concern neither you nor — "

There was a crash; the table was violently upset, and Hiram Jacob was gone. A hole in the roof of the porch marked his exit from earth. He had accidently pushed the button while the machine was pointed toward himself; and as he had it in his hand at the time, it of course went with him, as did also the chair on which he was sitting.

After gathering together my scattered senses, by which time Mr. Jacob and my chair were fifty miles on their way to the stars, I picked up the table and quietly destroyed the letters I had written, and after a little while I called on Helen to talk over the plans for our wedding.

The Music of Money.*

BY NEWT NEWKIRK.

BAPTISTE LACROIX was weazened, withered, little and old when he came alone from France to New Orleans. He died there, but that was in 1801, so his story has been lost to the world in the years that have passed. Baptiste LaCroix had a god — Baptiste LaCroix loved but one kind of music — his god was money and his music was the chink of the shining metal.

Often, as he walked, Baptiste thrust his hands into his pockets and ran his trembling fingers among a few coins he always carried, so that they would clink together. Then his eyes would dilate, his step would quicken and over his seared face would creep a smile, but it was a smile that chilled — the smile of a miser. He never did this within the hearing of any one but himself. Baptiste was selfish of his music, and besides, he feigned to be poor — so poor that the covering was worn off the buttons on his coat and the cloth upon his elbows thin and polished with long service — so poor that he scarcely bought food sufficient to sustain him, and therefore he sometimes went hungry. He was often called a beggar and was as often pleased, for if the world believed him poor the world would not rob him. Poor Baptiste!

He brought with him from over the sea two chests which were bound in iron, and stout. They were small, but they were heavy. In the old French Quarter of New Orleans the miser bought a house. The reason he bought it was because the house was put up at sale to satisfy a creditor and went for a song. The building was not large — certainly not beautiful — but it was strong, the walls were thick, and that sufficed. Into this house the miser moved the two chests and within it he lived, its sole tenant.

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $100 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

When the nights were dark he would close the shutters, bolt the door and, by the light of a sputtering candle, unlock the chests and filter through his trembling fingers the gold and silver coins that filled them, until his heart would pound in unwonted rhythm to their music. Baptiste would then relock the chests, push them under his bed, tie the keys about his neck, blow out the candle and creep to bed, where the blended echoes of gold and silver would lull him to sleep. When there was a moon, enough light filtered through the windows to make the candle an expensive luxury. Moonlight cost him nothing.

Baptiste began to look about him for some means whereby he might add to his hoard of wealth; the more money, the merrier music. There were profits to be made in the traffic of slaves. He investigated and learned that men about him had become rich in that business; they had made money that might as well have been his. But the buying and selling of slaves had a risk that terrified him. These blacks were ill-treated and ill-fed; many of them were old and one or more might die on his hands. The loss of their lives was nothing but — the loss of profits! He wished he could have bought and sold their souls, for he had heard somewhere that souls never die.

The conditions, however, were before him and he must risk if he would win. He bought with the marvellous eye of a miser, in a small way at first, but, as he learned the tricks of the trade, more extensively. Baptiste was a modest middleman. He knew where to put his hands on such slaves as his patrons wanted. He dealt in fathers, mothers, sons and daughters as if they had been so many sheep or cattle. He bought low; he sold high, and prospered, but in such a quiet way that few seemed to know who he was or where he lived.

Baptiste, in his best years, had never accumulated money so rapidly. He saved it, all but the trifle on which he lived, and in time filled a third chest. The music grew the sweeter and the more mellow as his hoard increased and as his creeping age enfeebled him. The time came when it required all his strength to drag the smallest chest from under the bed so that he might sift the coins and hear them ring. The exertion spent his strength and he often wished it were possible to sit idly by and yet hear

the clinking of the coins. As he pondered over the idea of the money making its own music a plan unfolded itself and Baptiste resolved to adopt it straightway, even if it should cost something.

The next day and for many days thereafter, workmen were busy in the miser's home. Baptiste followed them about and directed. When they had finished, the result of their labors stood in the centre of the room where he ate and slept. It was massively built, stone upon stone, from the ground beneath the floor to the height of nine feet. Its other dimensions were three feet each way, making its horizontal section square. Its walls were six inches thick, leaving an interior two and one-half feet square in which a man might stand erect and turn about. The inside was metal-lined. There was a solitary barred window, a few inches square, in one wall of the structure, within arm's reach from the inside, that admitted a shaft of light. There was also a heavy, swinging panel door that locked with a great key, through which a man might squeeze within the walls. Above, and with its apex hanging downward on the inside, was a metal hopper as large as the top of the structure. The slot in the apex of this hopper was the thickness and width of a current gold or silver coin. Baptiste's triumph might have passed for a huge stone chimney, but it was a money music box and, at the same time, a vault.

The miser had only to carry his coin in small loads up the ladder against the outside, empty them into the hopper, release the mechanism at the slot, which would drop the pieces at whatever pace desired, and listen in idle ectasy to their music as they dripped within the vault, rolling and ringing in sweetest symphony. There was something almost pathetic in the childish way poor old Baptiste would unlock the vault door at night, carry a few gold and silver burdens aloft to the hopper, release the slide at the slot and then sit crouched outside the walls, listening to the money's music.

The miser had been blessed with a most profitable week in his slave traffic. He counted his earnings with excited fingers on Sabbath morning and promised himself a concert, the like of which he had never heard, on that very day. Going up and down the ladder was toilsome work for a feeble old man like Baptiste, but the

promised music seemed to lend unusual strength to his tottering legs and palsied hands. How many times he crept aloft burdened with coin he knew not, but at last his wealth lay gleaming in the hopper and the vault was empty.

Then Baptiste set the slot at a measured pace, went down the ladder for the last time and, sliding through the open panel door, pulled it slowly to and locked it on the inside. He even removed the key and placed it on the ledge of the single window which lighted the interior, as if it were safer there. The miser's grand concert was under way. The coins fell at his feet and rolled about with ringing accents. Baptiste crouched in the corner and closed his eyes, so that vision might not share with hearing. The music thrilled, then soothed, his tired faculties, and at length his white head nodded and Baptiste slept.

. . . . . .

When the miser opened his eyes he knew not for the instant where he was, until his ear caught the sound of the coins which were yet falling. He was chilled and aching with the sensation of a great weight bearing him down. He tried to rise from his cramped posture, but his stiffened limbs responded weakly and it was with difficulty that he shook off the weight and struggled to his feet. Then he reeled and would have fallen had not the close walls of the vault supported him. He was seized with a choking sensation, and in nervous haste stretched his thin hand upward toward the key which lay on the window ledge.

His trembling fingers touched it — pushed it through the bars — where it hung balancing an instant, and then fell *on the outside*.

As the key struck the floor it rang with a clink that seemed to mock the clink of the falling coins within.

As the full significance of the miser's situation forced itself upon him, his knees gave way and he sank in a limp and motionless heap — a prisoner with his wealth. His eyes were closed and his head rested sidewise on his knees, directly under the slot. Each falling coin struck him on the temple and glanced against the metal lining of the vault with a ring. Baptiste was yet conscious, but without the power to move. The coins smote him with pendulum-like regularity, until each one pained like a knife-

thrust and then jingled merrily to rest among its fellows. At length the money's music came to him indistinctly, as if it were a great way off, and he felt the pain no longer. Baptiste was drifting — drifting in a golden ship over a golden sea. The shimmering waters rocked him gently, while the waves covered him with their glittering spray. Then Baptiste fell into a sleep — a sleep wherein the heart stops and the flickering light of life goes out.

The coins continued to fall in measured accents, chanting a weird requiem and wasting their music within that prison sepulchre.

The Yellow Mask.*

BY CHARLES NEWTON HOOD.

HE cleverness of Lemuel C. Loomis was ingenuity raised to a very high power, and if he had any local rival it was certainly his ingenious helpmeet, Lucinda L. Loomis, born Laurence. When they were married the groom had reached his fifty-second year and the bride had bidden farewell to the frivolous thirties.

As nothing will develop a latent talent for labor-saving devices more thoroughly or impart a more intimate knowledge of one's own peculiar traits than living alone, the couple entered upon their new experience unusually well equipped in both these respects, and their house-hunting was rendered both easier and more difficult. They examined a great number of houses in their little village, and made the real estate agents a great deal of trouble, but they knew so well what would and what would not answer their purposes, that they were able to give prompt and decided decisions after one inspection.

Finally the choice narrowed down to two houses, at about the same price. Each was three squares from the church which they attended and four from the post-office, and the interior arrangements of both were, in the main, satisfactory. Each, however, had one great defect. The house on Locust Street had no hall, the front door opening directly into the sitting-room, while the Elm Street dwelling, with an ample hallway, had neither a bath-room nor any space that could be converted into one.

"Which shall it be, Lucinda?"

"What do *you* think, Lemuel?"

"I would much rather that you would say, my dear."

"And I should prefer that you should decide, darling."

"Well, then, without either of us deciding it," said Mr. Loomis,

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diplomatically, "let us each write our opinion on a piece of paper, and exchange them."

"All right," agreed Mrs. Loomis.

Mr. Loomis unfolded his wife's opinion with much curiosity and read:

"I have always said I would never live in a house which did not have a front hall."

Mrs. Loomis read on her husband's slip:

"It has always seemed to me that if I were building a house, I'd build a first-class bathroom, and with what money I had left build the best house I could around it."

Both laughed heartily and rose with one accord to give the houses another inspection.

"It would be pretty hard to build a hall on that Locust Street house," said Mr. Loomis.

"But by building an addition on the west side of the Elm Street house," replied Mrs. Loomis, "we could have a nice bathroom, without much cost, and build it when we can best afford to."

Mr. Loomis complimented his wife on this happy solution of the difficulty, and before night had secured a deed of the Elm Street property. Then he figured a little and said:

"I don't think we can afford to build the addition this year, and I dislike to perform my ablutions in a wash-tub or — "

"Oh, I have thought that all out," replied Mrs. Loomis, smiling, "and I have such a nice idea. We will buy a handsome tub — just such as we will want for our new bathroom — and set it up back of the kitchen range. There needn't be any plumbing, except the exhaust pipe, for it will be so close to the range that one can dip the hot water from that, and by turning the top of the rain-water pump in the sink around, cold water can be pumped directly into the tub. We can have a nice broad shelf on hinges to let down over the tub, and that will make a splendid kitchen table, and nobody need ever know that there is a tub there.

While this ingenious arrangement would have been very inconvenient for some families, it was perfectly suitable for the Loomis *ménage*, free from even a kitchenmaid. Down behind the range proved an exceedingly cosy, warm spot in which to take a leisurely

bath. The new tub was a beauty, and when the broad shelf, practically amounting to a folding table, was dropped down over it, supported by two swinging legs at the right height for a work bench, Mrs. Loomis said it was the most convenient for washing dishes on that she had ever seen, and it was not at all uncommon for Mr. Loomis to assist her in that employment, that their Sunday forenoons and all their evenings might be longer.

Mr. Loomis was a member of the village Board of Trustees, which held its sessions on Saturday evenings, and it was his custom, on returning from these meetings, to enjoy a thorough, leisurely bath before retiring. Then he had the kitchen all to himself and could take his time.

One particular Saturday night the village council had held such a protracted sitting that it was actually Sunday morning when Mr. Loomis stole into the kitchen, swung up the portable table, and as silently and rapidly as possible filled the tub. A flood of moonlight came in through the windows, and he did not trouble to light the gas, but was soon soaking placidly in the warm and comfortable bath.

A heated discussion over the purchase of a road roller had wearied Mr. Loomis considerably, and while reviewing the arguments as he lay in the tub, he fell asleep. This he himself denies, asserting that he heard the first touch of the burglar's hands on the window fastening. This latter statement there is no means of controverting, but it is positively known that Mr. Loomis did not enter the kitchen later than a quarter past twelve o'clock, that the intruder's presence was not observed much before two, and that it had never before taken Mr. Loomis an hour and three-quarters to bathe.

However, when he did hear the fumbling at the fastening, his first impulse was to leap from the tub and repulse the invader. His second thought was merely to flee. What he did, in the excitement of the moment, was to reach upward, grasp the swinging shelf and pull it down just as he heard the kitchen window gently raised.

Either the water had cooled a great many degrees since he entered it, or else Mr. Loomis was very much frightened (he leaned toward the former theory), or the two reasons combined to

cause such a shiver that it was with difficulty that he prevented an alarming swashing in the bath. Peering cautiously over the rim of the tub, he shivered more violently than before. A man was crawling through the window. The moon had now nearly gone down, but the solid black silhouette indicated a rogue of monstrous size.

The suspense was horrible.

Before the intruder dropped quietly to the floor he shot a tiny searching ray of light into every corner, and the head of Mr. Loomis slid out of sight as a startled turtle slips off a log. In an agony of apprehension the householder heard the burglar tiptoe across to the pantry and back. Waiting as long as he could restrain his curiosity and alarm, he again peered cautiously between the table-shelf and the tub-rim.

The burglar was sitting in the middle of the room, with his back toward Mr. Loomis. By the faint light of the tiny lantern he could not see what the man was doing, and wriggled a little higher up. As he moved his feet there was a slight disturbance in the water, and Mr. Loomis realized only too well what it meant. Pending the permanent location of the bath-tub, he had, with his accustomed ingenuity, utilized a large cork as an exhaust plug, and this, loosened by his foot, had bobbed to the surface. The water was running out rapidly. When it was nearly all out the exhaust would make a hideous, gurgling wail, startling the burglar, Mr. Loomis would be discovered, and in his helplessness probably murdered.

He fumbled wildly for the cork, but it eluded every clutch, and he dared not make a noise. He tried to check the flow of the water by inserting his toes in the orifice, but this only slightly delayed the end. Nothing could stop the water — his moments were numbered.

Discovery being inevitable, it were better to be prepared for defence, he thought, before the alarm from the exhaust pipe came. As quietly as possible he pushed the shelf upward on its well-oiled hinges. Fortunately, it made no noise. He rose slowly on his benumbed limbs and stood upright in the tub. The water was getting lower and lower and he had but a moment to decide upon a plan of action.

He could now see the burglar, who was engaged in devouring a lemon pie, a sort which Mrs. Loomis made especially well, and of which Mr. Loomis was particularly fond, and which had been intended for their Sunday dinner. It was as yellow as gold, and topped with a beautiful, thick, frothy meringue. If the blood of Mr. Loomis had not been so chilled, it would have boiled at the sight of the rough-looking robber wrecking this masterpiece of pastry, and feeding with a knife at that.

The time for action had come. Mr. Loomis felt around for a weapon, but could find none. He was in despair. The last wave of the retiring water floated the big bath sponge against his ankles. He reached down and grasped it.

As he straightened up with it poised in his hand, he was dismayed to hear a light step on the back stairs — Mrs. Loomis was descending to see why he had not come to bed. It was a fearful crisis. At that very moment the bath-tub exhaust emitted a ghastly, gurgling groan, followed by a sucking, swirling shriek.

The very worst had come, and Mr. Loomis, steadied by a realization of the critical situation, raised the saturated sponge with careful aim, and let it fly. With a soggy swash it struck the burglar squarely in the back of the neck, forcing the villanous face violently into the centre of the lemon pie, to the very bottom of the dish.

When the burglar's countenance was withdrawn it wore a mask of yellow fringed with frothy white, from which two beady eyes protruded with a horrible stare. They fell upon the open doorway of the back stairs, where a plump matron in snowy white just then sat forcibly down upon the bottom step, still clinging to a smoking lamp, whose shattered chimney fell upon the floor.

Then, as they turned in the direction from which the cold, paralyzing missile had come, and beheld the stark form of Mr. Loomis, their owner gave utterance to a cry very like that just emitted by the bath-tub, and disappeared through the open window. The clock struck two.

The French Doll's Dowry.*

BY FLORENCE GUERTIN TUTTLE.

HEN my husband admires a woman I always make it a point to cultivate her. Opposition only fans the flame which good-natured toleration blows gently out.

My husband is a physician who thinks that he knows women from A to Z. In reality, he does not know them from A to B. This, however, is his only weakness and is a harmless form of self-deception. So I allow the assumption to go unchallenged.

Our two children had become old enough to temporarily leave the parental nest. Placing them in reliable schools, we made plans for the fulfilment of our long cherished dream — a somewhat belated, but wholly appreciated, European honeymoon.

After a Continental tour, enhanced by precious immature letters from America, we returned to London, where we had chosen to spend the last few weeks of our vacation.

One afternoon as we were walking down a corridor of the Hotel Cecil we were arrested by an appealing exclamation. Turning to a small hall on the right we found a young woman combating the predicament of having shut her train in the door. She was strikingly pretty, with blooming blonde loveliness. Her attractions were further heightened by an elegantly severe street suit, the perfection of sartorial art.

The more the fair prisoner tried to extricate herself, the more the clinging cloth frock wrapped itself severely around her form. The pose might have served for that of a Greek statue brought suddenly to life.

Beauty was a shrine before which my husband always swung incense. Beauty in distress was an altar before which he fell upon willing knee.

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $100 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

"Permit me," he exclaimed, springing forward to free the stranger.

"You are very kind, but it will not avail," she rippled back, with an enchanting laugh. "I cannot be liberated unless we cut my gown. And I haven't the heart to cut so valued a friend. If you would be good enough to go to the office for a key, however, (K 116), we will show this door who is master, and I shall be greatly the debtor to your courtesy."

Like Adonis at the command of Venus my husband flew for the lift. The imprisoned goddess swept me with a glance preliminary to the imposed tête-à-tête.

"I am interested in detecting nationalities," she said, with listlessly polite intonation, as if to fill in the delay. "Am I right in inferring that English is not yours?"

"Yes, we are Americans," I replied, with the pride of the Star-Spangled Banner in my voice.

Her indifference instantly vanished. Instead a look of intense interest illuminated her features.

"Then we are cousins!" she exclaimed, with a cordiality that the knowledge of my habitat had nowhere else aroused. "Blood-relations, in spite of poor, blundering King George. You are remaining in London some time?"

"No, only for about a month," I replied, more than gratified by her interest.

Her eyes seemed to interrogate me still further. Their complete absorption in my personality proved a form of flattery that my ego could not resist.

"We are leaving for lodgings in Kensington Road," I obeyed. "My husband thought that their quiet would be pleasanter than the unrest of a hotel."

At that moment the doctor returned with a key. He slipped it into the spring lock and in a second the prisoner was again tasting the sweets of liberty.

"May I not have the pleasure of remembering the name of my emancipator?" she enquired, giving my husband a smile that would have warmed the heart of a stone image.

"Certainly," he said, reaching for his card-case, the embodiment of delighted acquiescence. After a few more civilities we left.

"What a beautiful woman!" my husband exclaimed, as we drove through a London labyrinth of vehicles.

"What a clever one!" I returned. "In five minutes she had my past, present and future! As for us, we did not even secure her name. She looks like the women who make or mar history. Hers, I am sure, is not the feminine chronology of lived, married and died. Why did she take such an interest in us when she found that we were Americans? And wasn't it rather strange that she asked so many questions about people whom she never again expected to see?"

My husband laughed and advised me not to look for underlying motives. Suspicion, he said, sapped the foundation of social intercourse. I must take people, as he did, for what they appeared to be.

But I could not drive this unusual woman from my thoughts. Before we left London I felt that she would again sweep into our orbit. This feeling was so strong that, two days later, when I met her coming up the garden walk, followed by a maid and a cabman bearing her luggage, I exhibited no surprise. I felt only greater faith in my own intuitions. Her surprise at seeing me seemed complete and found vent in delighted ejaculations.

"Mrs. Atherton," she exclaimed, holding out both hands. "*Quelle chance!* Have I chosen the vine and fig tree that shelters you and the gallant doctor?"

Something within me — a possible sixth sense — told me that she was falsifying. Not only had she known that she was coming to our lodgings, but for some inexplicable reason *she had followed us there*. From the porter who had sent our trunks she might easily have procured our address.

My distrust, which before had germinated, blossomed now into full growth.

When I mentioned my conjectures to my husband he scouted them. It was true that I commanded no argument either logical or fair. I was certain that this woman was untrustworthy. But I could offer only the feminine reason that her eyes were set too near together and that I trusted my instinct — that thing some one has said a woman feels when she is wrong.

The doctor was of course delighted at the "coincidence" of our

second meeting. Up to this time there had been thirty-six women whom my husband had affirmed were the Creator's masterpieces. Mrs. Delenbar, I saw, was destined to be the thirty-seventh and to surpass all the others. The favorite was sure to be the one who could answer "present" to the roll call. This attitude did not alarm me. I had learned that my husband was a lover of all womankind, but was in love with one only.

Burying my suspicions, I adopted my usual cue and let my friendship follow where my husband's admiration lingered.

The next morning we found Mrs. Delenbar's superior knowledge of London at our service. After that hardly a day passed without an excursion of three to a place of historic interest, an informal dinner or visit to the play.

Soon the fact became apparent that designs upon my husband was not Mrs. Delenbar's motive for cultivating us. Her attention to his wife was even more marked. But she could not disarm my original disquietude. Some day this woman would use us. Why else had she followed us? We were people of moderate income. Little had we to attract a person of Mrs. Delenbar's brilliancy and wealth. I resolved to be as gracious as my conscience would permit while, like a detective, I watched her every initiative.

One morning we invited her to go to the shops and to luncheon afterwards. Unlike her usual custom, she declined. She had letters to write, she said, and did not intend to go out.

Our wanderings led us at noon to a small curio shop just off the Strand. Its sign told us that relics of South Africa were to be found within. Oom Paul had issued his famous ultimatum. The indignant British Lion was even then roaring a declination of the terms, without thanks. We wished to secure some souvenirs of the Dark Continent to commemorate our presence in London at the nativity of such portentous events.

When we entered the store I stood still in amazement. In the shadowy rear of the long, low room stood Mrs. Delenbar, exchanging papers with a short, swarthy man.

I turned to my husband.

"Look!" I said quickly. But when we turned again, the back of the shop was vacant. The lady and her strange companion had withdrawn into another room.

"You were mistaken, of course," my husband asserted. "Mrs. Delenbar distinctly said that she would not leave the house."

I did not attempt to convince him, but was confident that I could trust my own vision. The man with whom she had been earnestly talking had borne the unreal, opera comique air of foreigners. He might have impersonated any rôle from an ambassador to a pirate. The interrogation in my mind was what part he played in the drama of Mrs. Delenbar's life.

When we again met she did not refer to her outing. She assumed — perhaps she believed — that we had not seen her.

I was now confident that all in her life was not open. Who was she? What had she to conceal? Whence came those lovely gowns and jewels? Where was Mr. Delenbar, and why was she travelling alone and unattached?

A few days later an incident occurred confirming my own and awakening even my husband's misgivings.

We had returned from a visit to the National Gallery, where Mrs. Delenbar had kindly introduced us to the kings and queens. We were taking tea in a room on the ground floor. From it we could see the tiny garden, high brick wall and passing vehicles.

I had noticed that in any public room Mrs. Delenbar never sat with her back to the door. Her alert eyes seemed ever watchful. Suddenly I saw them darken. If escape had been possible I am sure that she would have fled.

From her vantage seat she had observed a hansom draw up at the gate. I looked out and saw a tall, bronze-faced man of distinguished carriage mount the villa steps.

"Mrs. Delenbar! What fortune!" he exclaimed, going towards her with the delighted air of one who renews a valued acquaintance. "How strange that you should be the last English person to bid me adieu in South Africa and the first to greet me in Kensington Road! Why did you conceal the fact that you were so soon to follow? Did the certainty of war rob West Griqualand of its charms?"

Mrs. Delenbar was as flatteringly cordial to him as she was to all of masculine gender. She asked permission to present Mr. Everard, and he and my husband were soon engaged in a conversation as to the pros and cons of the coming war.

Almost immediately Mrs. Delenbar withdrew. She was not seen again for many days. Her maid said she was ill and obliged to keep quietly within her room. This statement I took the liberty of doubting.

I had now, at last, something tangible upon which to base suspicion. For three weeks this woman had been constantly with us, yet never once had she mentioned having visited the land whose name was upon every tongue — the land from whence, it now appeared, she had just returned. This was doubly striking, since she had talked freely of her travels. Her varied experiences, retentive memory and reminiscences of distinguished people whom she had met made her the most entertaining of companions. Why had she been silent concerning her visit to the Boers? Why had she secretly visited the little South African store? Why did she wish to avoid Mr. Everard and sham illness to keep out of his way? These were questions which my husband hoped that Mrs. Delenbar would plausibly answer. But the explanation would have to be more than plausible to satisfy me.

From Mr. Everard I could learn nothing of enlightening interest. He had known her only as we had — as a charming woman, possessing the rare combination of beauty and brains.

He was an Englishman, a cattle breeder in the Orange Free State, near the border of West Griqualand. Mrs. Delenbar had visited his ostrich farm with some people of social standing. He had afterwards met her at their home. Her interest in the ostriches had been so intense and childlike that he had named a young bird of particularly fine plumage after her. She had plainly captivated him, as she had my husband. His home was on a platte, however, away from the towns. His opportunity for seeing her had therefore been slight.

With Mr. Everard's departure Mrs. Delenbar's illness, as I foresaw, took a decided turn for the better. She reappeared looking rosier than ever and with the anticipated story at her tongue's end.

"I feel that I can trust you and the discreet doctor," she sighed, with her pretty air of unenlightening frankness. A gold vinaigrette with an amethyst top was in her hand. This, cleverly applied, stimulated sympathy by producing an effect of semi-invalid-

ism, or at least interesting convalescence. Mentally she was very much troubled, she said. And this was the explanation of her unrest to which she treated us:

She had an elder and much loved brother. At present this brother was in the small African republic which was challenging the attention of the giant nations of the world. A man of large wealth, she said, he fostered peculiar ideas of dispensing it. In fact, he was a socialist. His ambition was the chimera of bringing universal democracy to the earth. This social treason against his inherited aristocratic proclivities was laid like a blight at the doors of Ruskin and Carlyle.

Now the Transvaal, or to dignify it with its constitutional name, the South African Republic, represents in one respect, as every one who cares for such uninteresting items knows, the most ideal democracy ever formed; every white man within its borders has not only a vote, but receives a homestead of three thousand acres from the public lands. Her brother, believing in this governmental distribution, had gone to the Transvaal to study its patriarchal form of rule. His acquaintance with them had aroused strong sympathy for the Boers. Pity had then led him to embrace their cause and to offer not only his wealth but his life.

That one of her own blood should bear arms against England and her dear Queen was more than Mrs. Delenbar could endure. To try to dissuade him from this rashness she had made a secret pilgrimage to South Africa. At least, the visit had been kept a secret from her English friends. For, as we plainly could see, in case of an outbreak, she preferred to have it unknown that one of her ancient, blue-tinged blood had joined forces with those ignorant, unreasonable Boers.

My husband drank in this story as does a lamb its mother's milk. Having lived three weeks in London he felt that he understood the English character to the marrow. Mrs. Delenbar, he said, embodied its pride, its loyalty to tradition and to the throne. No one should learn from him of her anxiety or well-established occasion for grief.

As for me, I did not credit a word of the story. Try as I might, however, I could not surprise Mrs. Delenbar into one contradictory statement.

I felt baffled, but not convinced. The next day I stumbled upon a clew which at once became a key to the conduct of my lovely enigma.

In my presence she received a registered package with a foreign stamp. Through a mistake the parcel was brought first to me. I detected "West Griqualand" on the post-mark. I could not read the name of the town, however, as Mrs. Delenbar's voice rang out sharply:

"I think the package is for me." Then, recovering her usual tone, she murmured, "My poor brother!" But she did not open the parcel until she was alone.

Now she had told us that Johannesburg, in the Transvaal, was her brother's headquarters. Here was a discrepancy — although, of course, her brother might be travelling about. Then, like an inspiration, the truth flashed over me — this was an official communication. *Mrs. Delenbar was a governmental spy.*

I had heard of the beautiful Nihilists and feminine emissaries of the Russian diplomatic corps. Even in our own country had we not our much vaunted secret service? In Europe, the land of intrigues, where courts slept with arms folded upon down-turned bayonets; where the wolf of war was silenced only by a diet of costly armament; where diplomats fawned, that they might not frighten, and distrust was the policy that paradoxically maintained confidence, woman's wit was of value. By its aid secrets might be secured which would determine an Empire's policy. And who better fitted to ferret out information than the fertile-minded Mrs. Delenbar? Without awakening his suspicions had she not extracted the doctor's history from Genesis to Revelation? And had she not drained me also, deliberately on the defensive, of all that she wished to know?

Her secret visit to the South African curio shop and strange silence concerning her trip to Africa were now intelligible. What the spy theory failed to explain was the question in which I felt deepest interest — why had she left the Hotel Cecil to pursue an intimacy with an American doctor and his wife?

I did not inform my husband of my deductions. He was once more thoroughly under the spell of Mrs. Delenbar's charm and would only have upbraided me.

We were about to leave London and our baffling acquaintance. The discussion was therefore one which seemed profitless to pursue.

Mrs. Delenbar's grief at parting from us appeared genuine. Perhaps my husband's perfect faith touched her. She was aware of my distrust, I was sure, and respected me for it. I knew, too, that she congratulated herself upon the cleverness with which she thought that she had thwarted me.

When the final good-byes were said she gave us many assurances that she would certainly accept our kind hospitality (my husband's) when she came to New York. She then enquired casually the best method of sending a small parcel to America.

She had a French doll, she said, for the birthday of a little namesake — the child of the American friends whom she had told us that she dearly loved. She had dressed the doll with her own hands and would not have the little one disappointed.

Of course my husband volunteered to carry the keepsake. After many protestations she consented to burden us with it.

The "small parcel" proved to be a box nearly three feet long. It was about twelve inches wide and occupied a lion's share of my husband's Gladstone.

When she opened the box a new and fascinating side of her nature was revealed. Its contents proved to be a beautiful French doll dressed in the daintiest of bridal attire. With almost maternal pride she showed us its nainsook and real lace *lingerie*, every stitch of which, she affirmed, had been made by her own hands. When had she found time to accomplish this work? I could not restrain the thought that her maid might have enlightened me. Like a mother she guided my finger to a spring in the doll's chest. A slight pressure caused it to emit a species of "Jabberwock" supposed to be "Mama" and "Papa." She also tilted its body up and down that it might open and shut its blue eyes.

"The little girl for whom it is intended has blue eyes," she said. "She has clustering curls also, and the *ensemble* of a Raphael cherub. Only not the wings. Far from it! She is very human and very naughty at times."

When we were again alone my husband turned with an air of firm persuasion towards me.

"Now, Alice, will you abandon your suspicions? A woman who loves children as Mrs. Delenbar does cannot be far from right. I have been more annoyed than I cared to acknowledge. It is unlike you to distrust a lovely woman, whose only crime is that she has not introduced us to a husband — above or below the sod."

I did not reply. I was more than a little chagrined to board the steamer with my engaging mystery unsolved. For the power of the woman's attraction had drawn me singularly to her. I liked her while I doubted her. My study of her character had revealed many lovable womanly qualities running counter to those that repelled. Something in her eyes told me that ambition had not satisfied her; that at times she envied me my quiet life and contentment. I felt sure that whatever the secret she covered, the power of circumstances called Fate had drawn her into it. If she used people she was in turn the tool of her masters — unscrupulous politicians, I believed — who enlisted a clever woman to do the unclean work with which they refused to soil their hands. The first false step had probably been an unfortunate marriage. She was fond of children and they had been denied her. Her beauty and intelligence had then become the reef upon which she had foundered.

When we arrived on board the *Oceanic* we found some acquaintances from New York. At home we had only a bowing interest in them. We greeted them now with the irrepressible effusiveness one feels towards even casually familiar faces when met where familiar faces are rare. A common conversational ground was established by comparing experiences as to places we had visited and people we had met. The third day out Mrs. Delenbar's name was mentioned.

"It was our good fortune to meet her also," Mrs. White exclaimed. "She stopped a week, a short time ago, at Mentone, on the Riviera. She has all the gifts of the gods, has she not?"

A discussion of Mrs. Delenbar ensued, the men full of admiration and we women of curiosity concerning the bewildering stranger.

"She has friends in America from whom some day we may hope to hear her history," Mrs. White volunteered. "She is sending them a keepsake by me."

I stiffened with interest.

"It isn't — for a namesake, is it?" I enquired, with a nervous laugh.

"Yes. How did you know?" she answered.

"Is it," I gasped, "*a French doll?*"

"Yes," my friend again returned, completely mystified, while the gentlemen listened in dazed silence. "She dressed it entirely herself."

For a moment the blue of the ocean became indistinct and blurred.

"Is the namesake like — a Raphael cherub?" I asked.

"Yes, all but the wings," Mrs. White replied. "She is human and very naughty at times."

I dared not look at my husband. My thoughts were travelling faster than electricity could carry them. Instead of leaving my enigma behind I had brought it with me! I fell back limply in my chair.

"What does it mean?" asked the now thoroughly perplexed Mrs. White.

"It means that I, too, have a doll," I said weakly, "from Mrs. Delenbar — to a namesake — a Raphael cherub — without the wings!" Then I found presence of mind to enquire, "She did not know that you were to return on the *Oceanic?*"

"No; when we saw her we had expected to sail from Genoa. A cable from the firm brought Mr. White unexpectedly to London."

Mr. White tugged at his moustache.

"It may be all right," he muttered, "but it looks confoundedly queer."

My husband's face was troubled and pale.

"One course alone will settle suspicion," he said gravely. "The dolls must tell the story. I move that we appoint Mrs. White and my wife as a coroner's inquest to hold a post-mortem on the young ladies. Meantime, until we know that they hold a secret, let us judge not."

I loved him for this last sentence and for the genuine pain I knew that he suffered at the thought of a gentlewoman's downfall.

"Yes," I returned softly, "we will 'suspend judgment' until we have absolute proof."

But the Whites could not put the subject away. Not having entertained suspicions of Mrs. Delenbar they were much stirred by the sudden turn of affairs.

"Have you any theory as to what the dolls are likely to divulge?" Mr. White asked.

"I have," I replied. "I believe that they contain papers bearing secret information in regard to the situation in South Africa. My opinion is that our lovely friend is a British spy."

Mr. White gave a low exclamation. My husband made a deprecating gesture while he looked at the distant horizon.

"In that case we have no right to read the papers," Mr. White said.

"Nevertheless, I intend to know the true inwardness of my doll," I replied. "To be a spy is pardonable. To involve us in such a network of lies places the lady beyond our sympathy. Mrs. White, there is no time like the present. Will you descend, while the gentlemen wait for us, and help me dissect the demoiselle? If our suspicions are groundless we have a surgeon present," glancing at my husband, "who will take a few stitches and restore her to society."

For my husband's sake I made light of the occasion. But my heart was pounding like a piston.

My steamer trunk was soon pulled forward in my cabin. Its flat surface offered an impromptu operating table. The doll was extracted from her tissue-paper bed and stripped to her white glove-kid skin. I armed myself with some sharp-pointed scissors. Seating myself on the floor I braced my back against the bunk to resist the ship's motion. Then the autopsy began.

A body artery — an under-arm seam — was selected. Slowly I ripped each stitch. When an opening of three inches was effected I inserted a finger and worked it in the bran. Resistance nowhere met my digit. The doll's body was as free from foreign substances as was my husband's mind from guile.

To say that I was disappointed would be to acknowledge that I was predetermined to find Mrs. Delenbar guilty. I was disappointed that she had again circumvented me. Each leg and arm

was in turn examined, alike fruitlessly. I had succeeded only in sprinkling my stateroom with bran.

Mrs. White began to grow frightened.

"You have ruined the doll!" she exclaimed. "What will you do? Mrs. Delenbar will hear that you did not deliver it."

"Buy another one, of course, just the size of this one," I replied, dejectedly.

The situation seemed inexplicable. Yet I felt that I must be "warm," as the children say when the searcher approaches a hidden object. The solution must be at hand.

"Why did she send two dolls," I mused, "by two women whom she believed would not meet, to two namesakes, each answering the description of the other?"

"I don't know," Mrs. White returned, plaintively. "It looks strange, but we have plainly wronged her."

"I can't believe it," I replied decisively. "If there is any truth in the psychic, then I'm certain that instead she has wronged us."

I picked up the doll's head. It was made of the usual composition, exquisitely colored and set upon shoulders dimpled and plump. I turned it upside down. Then I made a discovery.

"It ought to be hollow," I asserted, examining it closely. "This one has been sealed in the small of the neck."

My enquiring mind when a child had insisted that I should "see the wheels go 'wound" in all toys. An experienced eye told me that all was not legitimate with this flax-covered head.

Then an inspiration came to me.

"Stand aside!" I commanded. Mrs. White was too dismayed to do anything but obey.

Holding the head aloft in my hand I threw it with all my force upon the trunk. It fell in fragments. Then from out of a mass of soft paper rolled numerous gleaming stones — flashing yellow and sparkling crystal white.

"Diamonds!" ejaculated Mrs. White.

"A smuggler!" I exclaimed under my breath.

At my request Mrs. White flew to her stateroom and secured her doll. Again an operation, this time beginning at decapitation, took place.

Once more the priceless stones rolled over the stateroom floor. Accompanying each head was a paper with a list of its precious freight — so many "straw-colored" diamonds, so many "off-colors," and so many "pure-whites." Each stone, also, was given its carat weight.

I prefer to drop the veil on the scene when my husband heard of our discovery. In all truth, however, I think I can say that he felt no more regret than I. To a spy who imperils all in the interest of his country, we could give our affection and even respect. If he lose his life for a cause, immortal laurels are his. But a smuggler! A trickster who works for private gain! We wisely concluded to drop Mrs. Delenbar from our conversation and thoughts.

The diamonds were sent anonymously to the governmental authorities. We did not wish to become known in connection with them. Through the addresses on the "keepsakes" we might have traced the American accomplices. But we would not hound them or an erring woman to a cell.

Forces not so kindly as ours, however, were fermenting against her. Soon after our arrival, in an English paper I read the following extract. It was copied from the *Kimberley Daily Advertiser:*

A DAINTY DIAMOND THIEF.

KIMBERLEY, May 24. — The annual diamond sensation is with us. This time, to lend variety to the old story, a beautiful woman of aristocratic connections is associated with the fraud.

Every one knows of the precautions against theft taken by the owners of the "Bulfontein," "Kimberley," "De Beers" and other mines. Yet, in spite of the thorough searching each evening of the Kaffirs who work in the mines — eyelids lifted and tongues drawn out — in spite of the fact that many of the mine owners compel the men to live in the Company's "compounds" while the blue clay is being worked, it is estimated that one-third of the diamonds are stolen each year. The Kaffirs dispose of the stones to the "I. D. B.'s" (Illicit Diamond Buyers), who in turn sell them at a large advance on the original purchase price.

The account then narrated the tale of a man — an apparent gentleman — who had long carried on an illicit traffic on a large scale. The medium through which he disposed of the gems was a lovely woman who had visited Kimberley each year. This woman had been secretly warned of the exposure and had suc-

cessfully disappeared. It was known that at the time she had been living in London. She was a blonde, and it was supposed that she had colored her hair and taken passage as a maid for the United States.

I did not intend to show my husband this article. But he had come quietly into the room, and finding me absorbed in thought had insisted upon knowing the occasion.

"I hope that we do not chance to meet her, Lansing," I said when he had read the extract.

"Because you would feel compelled to give her to the authorities?" he asked.

"No; because I should feel compelled to befriend her. She is the most magnetic woman I have ever met."

His eyes rested softly on me. I knew he was grateful to hear that I would console rather than condemn.

"I want you to tell me what first led you to suspect Mrs. Delenbar?" he asked, plunging his hands into his pockets as he paced the floor.

"Her eyes were set too near together," I smilingly replied.

Missing.*

BY MARY BOARDMAN SHELDON.

IT is good to travel far, and to come upon strange sights at the end of one's journey. This he who has tried it knows, and he who has not speaks without authority. But it is also good to come again to the heart-known spots of earth, and to find them still as one has had them in his thoughts. When one wants new things, it is best to go to new places for them.

There is a farm that I know of — about six miles from any railroad — and the owners thereof are my friends. I went there at first as a boarder, my occupancy of a room in the house and a seat at the table meaning so many dollars a week to the farmer and his wife, and meaning nothing more. When I stay there now, although the dollars are passed from hand to hand every seven days, as before, they long ago ceased to hold any significant relation to my position in the family. There may be those who will not credit this statement, but it is true.

After the lapse of a year and a half, I travelled again over the old trail, recognizing as I came the landmarks that had blazed the way for me on my first adventure to the place. At a little station in the woods I got out of the train, and there, on the platform, I found the farmer — his name is Hiram Tibbals — waiting for me with outstretched hand. We drove through the orange light and the purple shadows of the late summer afternoon, towards the farm, six miles away. I leaned back in the buggy, utterly content, too satisfied to talk. Mr. Tibbals held the reins in his left hand; his right lay on his knee. He drove with the easy mastery of long habit, with a careless caution that I remembered, and which now, in its recognized familiarity, added to my peace and blessed-

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $100 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending March 31, 1900.

ness. Everything was as it had been the first time I had come that way, and as I had found it on every return that I had made, and in this fact lay my happiness.

Only once, as we drove, was the deep-breathed silence broken:

"Looks natural?" Mr. Tibbals said, with the rising inflection.

"Very!" was all I answered him.

Just before we came to a village, two miles beyond which lay the farm, we passed a little cemetery. As we drove by, Tibbals leaned towards it from the buggy, half raised his hand in gesture, as if to point out something, dropped it, and turned to me. I waited for him to speak, but after an instant he looked away, settled back in his seat, and we went on in a silence that lasted until we reached the farm.

We came at dusk to the old, white house, and Mrs. Tibbals met me on the threshold. With her I went in, across the hall, and into the familiar sitting-room, while Mr. Tibbals drove away to the barn. Later, we three had tea, by lamplight, in the dining-room that I remembered so well. Then we went out, and sat on the long, low porch — Mrs. Tibbals in a little red rocker, the farmer and I with our chairs uptilted, our feet on the railing, our pipes in our mouths. Presently Mr. Tibbals repeated exactly the inquiry he had made on our drive from the station.

"Seems natural?" he questioned me again.

My content had taken another mood, and I responded this time with audible enthusiasm.

"Natural? *Yes!*" I testified happily. And then I enlarged upon this. "It's hard to believe that I've been away. Nothing is changed — nothing. It's all as I left it."

Mr. Tibbals twisted a little in his chair, and looked over at his wife. The slow, regular sound of the red rocker on the wood of the porch ceased. As the farmer took the pipe from his mouth and cleared his throat, I some way knew that the silence of our afternoon drive had been significant, and that it was now to be broken.

"There's been one change since you was here," Tibbals asserted at length.

"Has there?" I queried. Then I added, interestedly, "What is it?"

"We've calcerlated to tell you." It was the wife who answered me, speaking in that sincere way of hers that makes a man feel that she is trusting him with something. "If so be 'at you'd like to hear, we'd be glad to have you know about it."

"Of course I should like to hear," I told her, cordially and truthfully; but there were some moments of silence before either of them spoke again. At last Mr. Tibbals said, tentatively:

"I expect you don't remember much about the war?"

"The war!" I repeated in surprise, my thoughts flashing to San Juan and Manila Bay. "What war?"

"Oh," he answered, quickly, "not the war you're thinkin' of — not that; I mean the war of '61 — that I expect was over before you was old enough to know the awfulness of it, or to have it hurt you, anyways."

As I was born on the day that Lincoln was assassinated, it was quite true that my knowledge of the Rebellion is mostly second hand, and I admitted the fact.

"Yes," said Tibbals, nodding his head; "yes, I presumed you must be some'ers about that old. Well," — here he took his feet down from the railing, and turned his chair, so that he faced his wife — "well, it ain't been so with us. We lived through them times, Mary an' me, an' I guess we couldn't forgit 'em if we tried."

"But you were not at the front, yourself?" I said, enquiringly. I was sure he had told me that he had lived all his life on that farm.

"No," Mrs. Tibbals answered, confirming my impression; "Hiram, he didn't go himself. I — our little baby — he couldn't go." She hesitated a moment. "That's what we've got to tell you. It's about — about him that went in Hiram's place."

"A substitute?" I questioned.

Mrs. Tibbals looked over at her husband, and he repeated my words in the tone of one who reverently gives another his just title.

"'A substitute' — yes, that's what Jim was — jest that — my substitute. He went instid of me."

Then I waited, while the locusts whirred outside and our pipes glowed in the shadow of the deep veranda. There was a story to come, I knew, and I listened for the words which were to bring it to me.

They came at length from Mr. Tibbals. "We wasn't married when the war broke out," he began to narrate, "though we'd been thinkin' about it for some considerable time. I was here, with mother, an' we'd both been glad enough to 've had Mary come; but she was livin' with her father in the village, an' she wouldn't leave him. Then, 'long in the summer of '61, he died, an' left Mary alone, an' the next fall we was married. Mother, she set great store by Mary. She used to say she didn't know why it was 't mother-in-laws an' daughter-in-laws didn't generally git along — she guessed if every daughter-in-law was like Mary, they would. "Well, mother lived till our baby girl was four months old. I'm thankful she did, for such comfort as she'd used to take with the little thing — there never was such a child, seemingly. Mary an' me, we thought so, too."

He stopped, and Mrs. Tibbals said, in a hushed voice, musingly:

"She had the prettiest hair I ever see — all soft-like, round her face. An' such cunnin', baby ways."

I tried to say something, but could think of no adequate word. Then presently the farmer went on speaking:

"It didn't last long — for mother — an' only a little longer for us. Mother died when we wasn't thinkin' of such a thing, very sudden, leavin' the baby, an' leavin' us. An' jest then — not more'n a month after that, it wa'n't — I was drafted. Mary — " He turned to his wife, as if appealing to her to tell the story.

"You was afraid to tell me," Mrs. Tibbals recalled. "You come back from the village, an' I see somethin' was the matter, but you wouldn't tell. An' then Jim come in — "

"Then Jim he come in," — the farmer took up the tale. "He'd heard at the store, an' he come right down, an' not knowin' I hadn't had the courage to tell Mary, he said right out: 'Look here, Hi, you're not goin'.' Mary, she says, 'Goin' where?' She was scared, though not knowin' why. I tried to hush Jim up, but Mary, she'd seen there was somethin' the matter, an' nothin' would do but I'd got to tell. Well, I thought then she was goin' to drop, she got so white; but Jim he spoke up quick, an' he says 'I tell you, you're not goin'. Don't look like that, Mary — for God's sake, don't! He ain't goin', do you hear? *I'm* goin'!' Then it came out as Jim had gone an' offered himself as my sub-

stitute, an' he was goin' instid of me. An' we both knowed why he done it. 'T wa'n't for *my* sake, though Jim an' me was always good friends enough. I knowed — though Mary never let on, an' Jim hadn't — that Jim — "

The rocking chair had not been in motion for some seconds, and at this point Mrs. Tibbals broke into the narrative.

"There, Hiram," she declared, "there's no call for you to say nothin' about that."

"About what, Mrs. Tibbals?" I enquired, with what I could not keep from being an overdone air of innocence.

The lady gave me no answer at all, and her husband went back, like Humpty Dumpty, to the last remark but one:

"All right, Mary, all right," he chuckled. "I guess I don't need to say nothin' more." But almost immediately the smile left his face, and his voice took on a deeper, graver tone, as he continued:

"But this I *will* say — it ain't in many men to do what Jim done. I'll swear it ain't in *me*. Talk about dyin' for a woman — an' there's more talkin' done than dyin', by a long sight — a man can do it, mebbe, if the girl he loves loves him. He can do it because her lovin' him has made him somehow more an' different from what he was before. But Jim — well — he jest give up *his* life because the woman he wanted loved another man than him, an' she'd 've suffered — her an' her little child — if I — if the other man — had went away to war."

The old farmer's clenched fist came down with force on the broad arm of his chair, and he threw back his head with a gesture of strong feeling. As for me, by some association of ideas there flashed before my mind a day when I, a boy of eight, went for the first time down the Potomac, past Mt. Vernon. The boat's bell had tolled, I had seen my father take off his hat and stand with bared head, and, only half knowing why, I had followed his example.

"That's what Jim done," the farmer's voice went on. "That's jest what Jim done, an' there ain't a monyment made that's too good for him. That's so, ain't it?" he asked, turning to me.

"Was your friend killed in battle?" I questioned him, not quite comprehending.

"Strange is the heart of man." With all the respectful sympathy which I certainly felt for the tale and its tellers, my brain, at this moment, automatically presented to my consciousness the words, "This would make a good play." I had nothing whatever to do with the formation of the idea; it simply leaped upon me, then was gone. At the same instant I was listening for the farmer's answer to my question, but his reply was intercepted by Mrs. Tibbals:

"Why don't you tell it out, H'ram?" she criticized. "He don't know what you're gettin' at."

"H'm'm," responded Mr. Tibbals. "Well," — turning to me, as he answered my question,— "that's what we've never knowed, whether Jim was killed in battle or not. Most likely he was, but we ain't never ben sure. We heard from him quite a few times after he went. He was gettin' on all right, he said, an' in the fights he was in nothing seemed to touch him. Then come Gettysburg. I brought home a paper, an' we looked for some word of Jim, as we always done, an' this time it was there. It stood out plain, as if there wa'n't nothin' else that side of the paper: — '*Missin': James Mallen.*' An' I think," the farmer testified, in the tone of one to whom experience has given insight, "I think there's nothin' harder nor worse for a man's friends to bear than that — jest *missin'!* There's nothin' you can take hold on. You jest set down, an' you wait. You have all the hurt of losin' of him, an' yet you have a tormentin' hope that mebbe he ain't gone, an' you'll hear somethin'. Well, we waited, but nothin' ever come of it — we never heard a word. I knowed in my heart Jim was dead, an' Mary knowed it, too, but she kep' tellin' herself, and tellin' me that she thought he'd come back — tryin' to deceive both on us, but not succeedin', exactly. She kep' it up, though, till it come Memorial Day, and they was puttin' flags an' flowers on the soldiers' graves, down to the buryin' ground. We rode past there, that mornin', an' we seen 'em doin' of it, an' quick as winkin', Mary says to me, says she, 'Where's Jim's flags? Where's his flowers? He'd ought to have 'em if anybody in creation'd ought," she says.

"'There ain't no grave for Jim,' I says. 'We don't know as Jim's dead.'

"With that, Mary, she begun to cry, an' she says, sort er chokin', an' sort er mad, 'Jim's dead, Hiram Tibbals, an' you know it, as well's I do!'

"Women is queer," commented the farmer, at this point.

"Well —" with a deep breath, "so that's the way it come that we got our minds set on havin' a monyment for Jim, an' a grave, even if he didn't lay in it. We wanted him to have all 't the dead soldiers had, an' more, if we could fetch it. We begun right away to put aside for a stone. It would take about one hundred dollars, we calcerlated, for we didn't want nothin' poor. We figured we could do it in a year, if we had good luck — or mebbe two. '*Say* two,' I says to Mary, 'an' there'll be no disappointments.' *Two!* Oh, Lord! It's ben thirty-five!"

"What!" I cried, incredulously. "You've been thirty-five years saving one hundred dollars? Nearly all your married life!"

Neither husband nor wife answered me for a moment, then:

"Tell him, father," Mrs. Tibbals commanded softly.

"No," the farmer corrected me; "no, it ain't exactly like that. You see there's ben setbacks, as you might say. The money's ben ready, or most ready, time an' again, an' then it's had to go. There was a fire, first; lightnin' struck the lower barns, after a dry spell an' what got burnt up in an hour took us near two years to get back again. An' after that — well — there come a time when there wa'n't no thought of savin'. Little Ruth — our little baby girl, we called her, though she was five, an' over — she begun to pine. God only knows how we tried to save her. There wasn't nothin' we didn't do. We spent all we had, an' we borrowed on the farm, but then! — 'twa'n't no use. Mebbe you've read a poem them times always puts me in mind of? 'Baby Bell,' the name is."

I nodded, looking straight before me into the moonlight.

"I thought likely you had. As far as that goes, I guess it was in one of them books of yours I seen it:

> 'At last he came, the messenger,
> The messenger from unseen lands.'

It was like that. She went, all we could do — we just stood by an' let her go, an' put her little body into the buryin' ground. You've seen her grave."

"Yes," I assented, a little hesitatingly. I knew the Tibbals lot in the cemetery, for the farmer's father and mother were buried there, with their names cut on stones at the foot of the graves. Also I had often remarked a little mound by the side of the others, but with no monument of any kind. I knew, for Mrs. Tibbals had told me, that the little Ruth was buried there, and I had often wondered that no stone marked the spot — no tablet, with the child's name or the dates of her short life. This was in my mind now, when Mr. Tibbals said, as if in answer:

"There ain't no monyment. We ain't never been able to have one. After we'd buried our baby, we talked it over, Mary and me, an' we settled it that if we ever got money to buy a stone, Jim had ought to have it. 'Little Ruth, she'll understand,' Mary says, 'she'll know — up in heaven.' It's been hard — not havin' no mark on the little grave — it would've been a comfort. But I'm glad we done the way we have, an' so is Mary."

He turned to the wife, and she met his look. She made no response, but none was necessary. I saw that the childless years had drawn these two into a relation that was perfect.

"We got the debts paid, at last, after a long spell of workin' an' savin', an' then we begun to lay by again. Things went well for quite some time, an' we'd saved considerable, and was thinkin' mebbe the time had come. An' jest then it was that the Widder Brown's boy went wrong. It come to me to know about it, an' there wa'n't nobody but me to save him, and to keep his mother from hearin' of it. She'd ben good to Mary, an' comfortin', when our baby went, an' — well — I jest couldn't face her, and tell her what her boy had done. There wa'n't much time to think it over — if Sam was going to be saved, it had to be done quick. So I told Mary the whole story, an' I says, 'What am I going to do?' Mary, she didn't have to consider long. It was Jim's money that was in both our minds, of course, an' she says, 'Hiram, the livin' had ought to come before the dead. Jim is where he don't sorrer at having no monyment, but the Widder Brown — Oh, father,' she says, coverin' her eyes — 'she loves that boy the way I did my baby!' There wa'n't no need to say any more. I took Jim's money, an' went out, an' paid Sam's debt, an' his mother never knowed. She died about two years back.